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AUTHOR Haugland, Maurice
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ABSTRACT

This paper, which highlights the findings of a recently completed doctoral dissertation, attempts to: (1) identify the desirable professional competencies of superintendents as perceived by South Dakota school board members and superintendents, themselves; and (2) determine which competencies, when performed unsatisfactorily, are the most common bases for nonrenewal of the superintendents' contracts. Data for the investigation were collected by means of two similar questionnaires completed by public school superintendents and school board members. Board members returned 655 questionnaires, and superintendents returned 178. Competencies ranked included: (1) public relations, (2) school finance, (3) personnel management, (4) curriculum development, (5) policy formulation, (6) school construction, (7) accomplish goals set by board, (8) superintendent/board relations, and (9) collective bargaining. School board members ranked: (1) personnel management, (2) school finance, and (3) curriculum development as the most important competencies. Superintendents ranked: (1) superintendent/board relations, (2) personnel management, and (3) public relations as the most important. Board members perceived personnel management, and superintendents perceived superintendent/board relations, as the most prevalent competencies resulting in dismissal, nonrenewal, or requested resignation of a superintendent. Recommendations include superintendent awareness of school board members' perception of desirable competencies, development of effective personnel management techniques, and better communication between superintendents and board members. (WTH)

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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES NEEDED BY SUPERINTENDENTS OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS PERCEIVED TO BE MOST DESIRABLE FOR SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT BY SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND SUPERINTENDENTS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

(The following article highlights the research findings of a copyrighted doctoral dissertation recently completed by Dr. Maurice Haugland, Superintendent of Schools, Yankton School District 63-3, South Dakota.

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Education was established in America for two-hundred years before the appointment of the first superintendent. The early superintendent's administrative functions were minor, but lay boards soon commenced to delegate responsibilities that projected the position into a profession (Griffiths, 1966) Since its early beginning, the position of school superintendent has been in a constant state of transformation and evolution.

A great deal has been written about the role of the superintendent, suggesting that a rather clear delineation should be developed between the legislative role of the board and the administrative role of the superintendent. Most public school board members and their superintendents get along in a professional manner, but a rift sometimes occurs when the board members and superintendents perceive their respective roles differently. It is, therefore, important that the role of the superintendent be clarified and the responsibilities for the position be defined.

In a recent nationwide survey, a signal emerged suggesting that school board members want a more activist role in managing the school and saw too much authority vested in the superintendent (Alvey &

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Underwood, 1985). The greatest disagreement existed in matters pertaining to personnel, as the school board and superintendents wanted more authority in this area.

The review of literature revealed two themes in conjunction with school board-superintendency relationships. One viewed the school board and the superintendent as a team, working together, and having overlapping duties. The other, more definitive in nature, viewed the school board and superintendent as two separate entities, each with defined responsibilities that when delineated, overlap only occasionally.

A lack of understanding of each other's role was the major stumbling block to effective board-administrator relationships affecting the entire educational process of the school. The literature review revealed that the board-superintendent relationship is dependent upon role specifications.

The purpose of the investigation was to identify the professional competencies of the superintendent of schools perceived to be most desirable for successful employment of South Dakota school board members and superintendents themselves. A secondary purpose was to determine which competencies, when performed unsatisfactorily, result in contract non-renewal of the superintendent. The respondents were requested to rank, in order of their importance, the following competencies: (1) Public Relations, (2) School Finance, (3) Personnel Management, (4) Curriculum Development, (5) Policy Formulation, (6) School

Construction, (7) Accomplish Goals Set by Board, (8) Superintendent/Board Relations, and (9) Collective Bargaining.

Answers to the following research questions were sought:

1. Did public school board members and superintendents agree upon the rank order of the professional competencies most desirable for success?

2. Did school board members and superinendents in small, medium, and large sized public school districts agree upon the rank order of the professional competencies most desirable for success?

3. Did public school board members and superintendents agree upon the rank order of the professional competencies that, when performed unsatisfactorily, result in contract non-renewal of the superintendent?

The findings of the investigation were based upon data collected by means of two individual but similar questionnaires completed by public school superintendents and public school board members in South Dakota between January 3, 1986, and February 10, 1986. One thousand seventy-six questionnaires were mailed to the public school board members and 655 useable questionnaires were returned, while 186 questionnaires were mailed to public school superintendents and 178 useable questionnaires were returned for data analysis purposes.

Two hundred ninety-eight, or 60 percent, of the board members in public school districts with fewer than 300 students returned questionnaires. Two hundred sixty-eight, or 63 percent, were received from public school board members in school districts in the 300-999 enrollment category. Eighty-nine, or 56 percent, of the public school board members with 1000 or more students responded. Eighty-eight, or 97 percent, of the public school superintendents in school districts with fewer than 300 students returned questionnaires. Sixty-six, or 96 percent, were received from public school superintendents in school districts in the 300-999 enrollment category. Twenty-four, or 92 percent, of the public school superintendents with 1000 or more students responded.

School board members from public schools ranked the competencies perceived desirable for successful employment, as follows: (1) Personnel Management, (2) School Finance, (3) Curriculum Development, (4) Accomplish Goals Set by Board, (5) Superintendent/Board Relations, (6) Public Relations, (7) Policy Formulation, (8) School Construction, and (9) Collective Negotiations.

Public school superintendents ranked the competencies perceived most desirable for successful employment, as follows: (1) Superintendent/Board Relations, (2) Personnel Management, (3) Public Relations, (4) School Finance, (5) Accomplish Goals Set by Board, (6) Curriculum Development, (7) Policy Formulation, and (8) School Construction and Collective Negotiations tied for eighth.

The competencies, curriculum development, superintendent/board relations, public relations, and school finance, had significant differences when analyzed statistically using the chi-square formula at the .05 level for the purpose of ranking competencies desirable for successful employment of public school superintendents.

The competencies, personnel management, policy formulation, school construction, accomplish goals set by board, and collective negotiations, revealed no significant differences in the perceptions of public school board members and public school superintendents, when analyzed statistically using the chi-square formula at the .05 level. The lack of significant differences resulted from the fact that the responses provided by the public school board members and public school superintendents were similar.

The public school board members in small sized school districts perceived the competency, school finance, as most important, while board members in medium and large sized school districts perceived the competency, personnel management, as most important for successful employment of the superintendent.

Public school superintendents in small and medium sized school districts perceived the competency, personnel management, as most important, while superintendents in large sized school districts perceived the competency, superintendent/board relations, as most important for successful employment of the superintendent.

Public school board members perceived the competency, personnel management, and public school superintendents perceived the competency, superintendent/board relations, as the most prevalent competencies that would cause a public school board member to dismiss, non-renew, or request the resignation of a public school superintendent in South Dakota. All of the competencies had significant differences when analyzed statistically using the chi-square formula at the .05 level for the purpose of ranking competencies for non-renewal of the superintendent's contract.

Public school board members perceived the competency, personnel management, and public school superintendents perceived the competency, superintendent/board relations, as the most prevalent reasons given for non-renewal of a South Dakota public school superintendent's contract.

Incompetency was listed 46 percent of the time and neglect of duty 41 percent by public school board members as the reason for non-renewal of the superintendent's contract under the provision of SDCL S 13-43-15.

On the basis of the findings and methods of the investigation, the conclusions are as follows:

1. Public school board members perceived the management of personnel as the key to a successful educational system. The public school superintendent, as the leader of the staff, must assume the task of effective and efficient management in order to be successful.

2. Public school board members and public school superintendents rank the competencies desirable for successful employment of a public school superintendent in a different order, which may lead to a misunderstanding of district priorities if policy guidelines are not clearly delineated.

3. Public school board members want the public school superintendent to be the educational leader of the school while handling the district's finances in a professional manner.

4. Superintendents from public schools realize that education is a profession of dealing with people and that personal associations with board members and employees are necessary for a successful school system.

5. Differences of perceptions concerning the competencies desirable for successful employment of a public school superintendent should be identified, recognized, and acknowledged to avoid misunderstanding between the public school board members and the superintendent.

On the basis of the findings and conclusions of the investigation, the recommendations are as follows:

1. Public school superintendents should develop an awareness of the public school board members perception of the competencies desirable for successful employment of the public school superintendents and improve those skills.

2. The public school superintendent should develop effective personnel management techniques.

3. Public school board members and public school superintendents should develop more effective communicative techniques in order to clearly establish each other's role.

4. College and university preparation programs for certifying public school superintendents need careful review and analysis. In light of the demands placed on the superintendent today, additional research concerning the existing training program competency requirements should be conducted.

5. The ASBSD and SASD associations should provide staff development programs for their membership to improve knowledge and skills in all matters relating to personnel management and conflict resolution.

6. An investigation should be conducted to clearly define the competency, personnel management, for successful employment of the public school superintendent as required by public school board members.